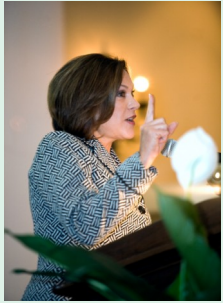


The Alliance

From **Your** Rutherford County Tourism
Development Authority

Exciting Update!

**Rutherford TDA Alliance Conference
November 8th 2012**



We are excited to announce that Lynn Minges, Assistant Secretary of Tourism, Marketing, and Global Branding for the N.C. Department of Commerce, will be the keynote speaker at our inaugural TDA Alliance Conference.

Lynn has served in progressive leadership roles within the department for nearly 20 years, and in her current

role provides leadership and strategic direction for the state's tourism, film, sports, and wine industries

while directing the state's marketing strategies to position North Carolina as the preferred location for domestic and international business.

Under her leadership, the department has been recognized with over 30 national and international awards for marketing excellence in the areas of advertising, cooperative marketing, website development, niche marketing, international marketing, and publications. And, tourism has grown to become a \$17 billion industry, employing nearly 200,000 North Carolinians.

We are excited and grateful that she accepted our invitation to be a part of our exciting November 2012 conference.

The all day event will take place at The Foundation at Isothermal Community College, Spindale, NC. This conference is for everyone, at every level, in every part of our county's hospitality and tourism industry.

In the meantime, if you have any questions, either email david.robinson@rutherfordcountync.gov or call David Robinson at 828-287-6130.



Talking Points

Let's Talk About Gas

The media seems intent on painting a bleak picture of gas prices: will they fall, will they rise? Will high gas prices discourage visitors from discovering our wonderful county during 2012? Some of the answers might surprise you.

Statistics show that whenever gas prices are high, people will still drive their motor vehicles during vacation time, but a large number of them take a driving vacation closer to home. Our partners at the Division of Tourism, Film, & Sports Development shared this and other facts related to gas prices and travel in North Carolina.

- North Carolina's proximity to many surrounding states makes it an attractive destination for road trips. Furthermore its geographic location halfway between major population centers in New York and Florida makes it a smart destination for millions of travelers who opt to travel by car.
- Rising gas prices do not appear to have a significant effect on visitation. In 2008, when gas prices were equally high, visitation at North Carolina attractions was at its peak.
- North Carolina offers excellent value for travelers faced with economic challenges. Visitors can get back to nature and take in our natural scenic beauty at hundreds of free sites from mountains to coast.
- An increase in fuel costs does not necessarily make travel out of reach. Even if prices hit \$5 per gallon, it will cost just \$26.30 more to travel round trip from Washington, D.C. to Manteo than it did in May 2011.
- No significant correlation between the rise in gas prices and NC visitation.
- Day tripper volume is affected more by gas prices than overnight visitation.
- For a fuel calculator visit <http://fuelcostcalculator.aaa.com/>.

What is the Alliance?

The TDA Alliance will connect you to opportunities, information and networking for one of Rutherford County's biggest industries – tourism. If you are with an accommodation, attraction, restaurant, or if you are an event organizer, business owner, or government entity, you are automatically a member – no membership fee required.

You will receive the monthly Alliance eNewsletter and much more. Call David Robinson at 287-6130 or send him an email at david.robinson@rutherfordcountync.gov to get in the loop!

Check Your Listing

One of the goals we have at the TDA is to "help you maximize your exposure and grow your business." One of the ways we do that is by listing your business via our web site at www.rutherfordtourism.com. Please check your listing once in a while, and if you need to make changes please let us know.

Another option is you can make changes to your listing yourself via our new, updated web site. To get your user name and password call David Robinson at 828-287-6130. Updated photographs, listings, special offers, and promotions can all help get the attention of potential guests, customers, and clients.

Industry News

How To Influence The “Generations” And Get Them Through Our Doors

Our business is about people - how to provide for their lodgings, meals, entertainment, recreation, shopping - the whole nine yards - away from home. We need to touch those various Generations out there who have very specific needs, so we need to learn about those ever-changing dynamics. I will write about three very distinct Generations - all of whom we serve, some probably better than others. I will write about one generation in each of the next three newsletters, starting with the Baby Boomers. From a marketing and business perspective, we may learn a few things to help us understand which each needs, what to avoid, and how we can better reach them.

Baby Boomers - born between 1946 and 1964, numbering about 77 million. No retirement plans for this crowd, and, until the housing market rights itself, they are stuck in their homes, worried about their pensions, health and life expectancy. Their Golden Years plans have been eroded. Priorities have also shifted or been abruptly disrupted where interest in material things has moved to greater interest in the ethereal - acquiring more experiences rather than more stuff.

With their own mortality in the rear view window, this generation is looking at ways to retain the vitality of their youth - looking good, feeling good. Sixty is the new forty! This may be seen with their objectives in financial well-being, the physical (health, fitness and appearance), social interaction, mental stimulation and the spiritual sphere. Additionally, they have again embraced family,

recognizing that their earlier engagements with their children might have been fragmented (half of all Boomers have been divorced once, and 25% divorced twice).

Lastly, in the face of misconception, they are pretty well wired and engaged with Social Media, but just prefer to speak with a real person when making a purchase decision or solving a problem. Where is Ponce de Leon when you need him!

What have we learned from this wonderful source? Customer Relationship Management, for one. Each Generation has its own quirks and definers. Secondly, the profiles can change quickly - just look at the Boomers and their economic realities.

We have seen they are technology savvy and marketing must be driven in that direction. Remember what happened when e-books hit the market - talk about a transformation of an industry with speed. We have seen that consumers want authenticity and honesty and brands preferably representing something good for society - deceit and fluff will be uncovered (and communicated) quickly. Lastly, it is all about engagement and relationships with the most successful marketing plans ageless, focusing upon the “Experience.”

~ David Robinson,
Internal Customer Service Manager

Meet Executive Director Michelle Owens Whitaker

Michelle Owens Whitaker refers to herself as a lifelong Rutherford County tourist—she never had the opportunity to live here, until she came to work for the TDA in 2008, but with all her family from the county, she always considered it home. Michelle has a background in marketing, journalism, and creative writing, an ideal combination in her role as Executive Director of the Rutherford County Tourism Development Authority.

Her vision and enthusiasm for the county is contagious. Here is what Wit Tuttle, Director of Tourism Marketing at the North Carolina Department of Commerce Division of Tourism, Film and Sports Development, had to say. “Michelle has been a great partner and has always been responsive to any requests from the Division. Her efficient work and eager participation makes our job a lot easier and helps to bring more visitors to North Carolina.”

~ David Robinson,
Internal Customer Service Manager

TDA Staff

Michelle Whitaker – Executive Director
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David Robinson – Internal Customer Services Manager
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Jackie Wallace – Administrative Assistant
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TDA Board Members

A directory of the current TDA Board members can be found by following this link.

<http://rutherfordcountync.gov/dept/tda/2011-2012%20TDA%20Board.pdf>

Rutherford County Tourism Development Authority ~
117 West Court Street, Rutherfordton, NC 28139
Telephone: 800-849-5998 or 828-287-6113 ~
www.rutherfordtourism.com

More Thoughts On Social Media And Tourism

Social Media Bookmarking in Tourism Industry

Social bookmarking is one of the fastest methods for internet users to organize, share, and manage web resources currently available as a SEO tool. Most of social bookmarking services support internet users to organize their bookmarks with informal tags such as tourism, travel, marketing etc. Such tags in fact promote your travel business and make it much more visible and searchable by search engines. When Tourism Review specialists submit your website to the leading bookmarking sites such as Delicious, StumbleUpon, digg, Yahoo!Buzz etc., you will quickly notice increased traffic to your website from people interested in your services. In addition, within weeks the one-way back links will have a positive impact on your website overall ranking.

Video Marketing in Tourism Industry

Video on your tourism or destination website is quite essential, but what about all the other video sites where many internet users are already actively watching video spots online? It is important to emphasize that with more than 3.7 billion search queries YouTube can now claim the title of "The 2nd Largest Search Engine". It is almost unknown that a correctly submitted video is more than 50-times more likely to push your tourism website on the first positions among search engine results than traditional SEO techniques. Sadly, many companies either ignore videos at all or only submit the page where their video is hosted but not the video spot itself.

If you have a promotional video or an infomercial that you would like us to add to our YouTube and Facebook accounts, please send them to Michelle Yelton at michelle@mccconnellgroup.biz

~David Robinson
Internal Customer Service Manager

The TDA Activity Report

What Is The TDA Up To For You?

TDA ACTIVITY UPDATE

Financial

Revenue & Expenses (Budget) (7/1/11 - 12/31/11)

- Total Revenue \$ 25, 570.85
- Total Expenses \$ 24,046.29
- Revenue Exceeds Expenses \$ 1,524.56
- Encumbrances \$ 97,793.06
- Available Budget \$ 316,956.30

Occupancy Tax (for December 2011)

- Total Tax Collected \$ 25,279
- 13.01% (from December 2010)
- Cash Balance \$ 653,887
- Category Comparison (for December 2011)
 - Bed & Breakfast 31.26%
 - Cabins & Campgrounds 13.33%
 - Hotel/Motel 3.48%
 - Resorts 113.41%

Budgeting for 2012-13 is underway and will be presented today.

Marketing

Online:

- Event season marketing in the Charlotte Metro DMA reaching over 263,682. Includes 130 channel targeted impressions/month.
- Event season marketing across 12 Southeastern states. Reaching over 100,000.
- Event season marketing nationally reaching over 300,000 visitors a month
- General image marketing across all 50 states reaching over 118,234.

Current Project Highlights:

- Outdoor Visitor Kiosk - Design/Development
- Window Cling/Display Holder - In approval process
- Mobile App & QR Code - Designed and developed App brand, home page and flowchart. In development.
- Generic Rack Card - QR code in development process
- Events Rack Card - In approval process
- Visitor Information Displays - In development process

Internal Customer Services

- Since October 2011 approximately 76 properties have been visited, with about another 45 to visit. Some are closed during the colder months and they will be visited as they re-open.
- People are excited about the county having a travel app', and are interested in the Alliance Conference scheduled for November 2012.
- Our first hospitality/tourism coaching class at Rumbling Bald has been re-scheduled from February to March. They will have more employees on board during March.
- We continue to plan the TDA Alliance Conference for Thursday, 8th November 2012 at The Foundation.

The TDA Activity Report

A Summary of our Recent Activity

TDA ACTIVITY UPDATE

Internal Customer Services - cont'd

- David Robinson is chairing the organizing committee that is responsible for all aspects of the Cycle NC Tour coming through, and staying overnight at Lake Lure/Chimney Rock 30th September 2012. It is anticipated that between 850 and 1,100 people will take part in the event. We will know for sure that our area has been selected 1st March 2012. David is working with leaders and volunteers in Lake Lure and Chimney Rock.
- David continues to work on creating packages that are season related. In addition, we are planning a summer sweepstakes, to be announced in March 2012.
- David will be visiting farms during late March – early April to start the process of marketing Agri-tourism in the county. A number of farms have already expressed interest.
- Our next Tourism Ambassador class is scheduled for March 2012; we already have people signed up.

Public Relations

Press Releases/Press Statistics

- **Total Press Impressions (Jan-Feb 2012):** 1.6 million
- "Lake Lure to host first Collegiate Community Triathlon" - Press Release & Pitch
- "WAS LINCOLN REALLY BORN IN N.C.? Compelling evidence supports local legend that Abraham Lincoln was really born in Bostic, N.C." - Press Release & Pitch

Select press hits:

- Charlotte Parent and Piedmont Parent (KidSenses)
 - ◆ <http://www.charlotteparent.com/articlemain.php?KidSenses-Sparks-Imaginative-Play-4055>
 - ◆ 3/Go Triathlon Magazine <http://www.3gomagazine.com/Foundation/content/17/585/LAKE-LURE-TO-HOST-FIRST-COLLEGIATE-COMMUNITY-TRIATHLON>
 - ◆ *(See appendices for more information)*

VIN

Completed Items

- The Town of Rutherfordton is formulating a lease agreement with the Bechtler House owners. Once completed, we can move rapidly on this VIN site.
- A discussion is also underway for a VIN site in the Town of Lake Lure.
- The proposed visitor information stand sites at previously selected locations around the county have been field reviewed and photographed to better ascertain the feasibility and construction of each.
- The in-county trailblazing directional sign assessment has been completed and recommendations identified. Further review by the TDA and stakeholders is necessary prior to making NCDOT contact.
- The out-of county directional sign assessment, previously completed, has been presented and awaits strategic presentation to NCDOT.
- Several meetings and presentations have been conducted with various stakeholders including Chimney Rock State Park and the Town of Lake Lure. The Lake Lure / Chimney Rock region has embarked on a separate wayfinding project so communication and involvement with these stakeholders in this area of the county is paramount to ensure a consistent county wide project. *(See the VIN-Wayfinding Committee Report)*
- NCDOT was present at one of the presentations so there was a further opportunity to convey our master plan and glean additional information on NCDOT's position.

The TDA Activity Report

A Summary of our Recent Activity

TDA ACTIVITY UPDATE

VIN - cont'd

- The project Gantt chart (task time line) continues to be revised and modified as TDA and stakeholder input is gathered. The corresponding task descriptions have been modified to add potential costs and have been lumped together in a bucket (or group) type arrangement for ease of prioritization and implementation. *(Again, see the VIN-Wayfinding Committee Report)*

Website

Completed Items

- Added street address to each listing at each appearance
- Homepage rotation fade improvement
- Front Porch font installed
- Template draft for vendor websites
- Allowed file size increase to 4MB for vendors
- Changed the company filter in the Content Management System to say "Listing Name"
- Full editor menu is displayed in content management
- Linked calendar
- Itinerary print page showing full information (i.e., address, phone, GPS, etc.)
- Corrected issue: Captcha Telerik not recognizing zero or "O" correctly in security login in the Content Management System

Leads

TDA Leads - total

- **Top Publications**
 - ◆ Blue Ridge Parkway Association - 154
 - ◆ Southern Living's Reader Inquiry - 11
- **Other TDA Leads - 87 total**
 - ◆ Large Quantity Requests - 75
 - ◆ International Leads - 12

TDA Telephone & Web Report

- 25 Contacts
- Top Three States: North Carolina, Florida, Virginia/Ohio
- Top Three "HOW THEY HEARD?": Internet, Other Sites, Family/Friends

VisitNC Reports

- Romance Dirty Dancing Style Sweepstakes - through February 13
 - ◆ 5,939 entries
 - ◆ 869 requests for information

NCTTC Meeting

Please see appendices for an update on the State of NC Tourism from Lynn Minges, Executive Director of Tourism, Film and Sports Development (NC Dept. of Commerce), presented at Monday's NCTTC meeting in Raleigh.